



First Generation Students in Higher Education

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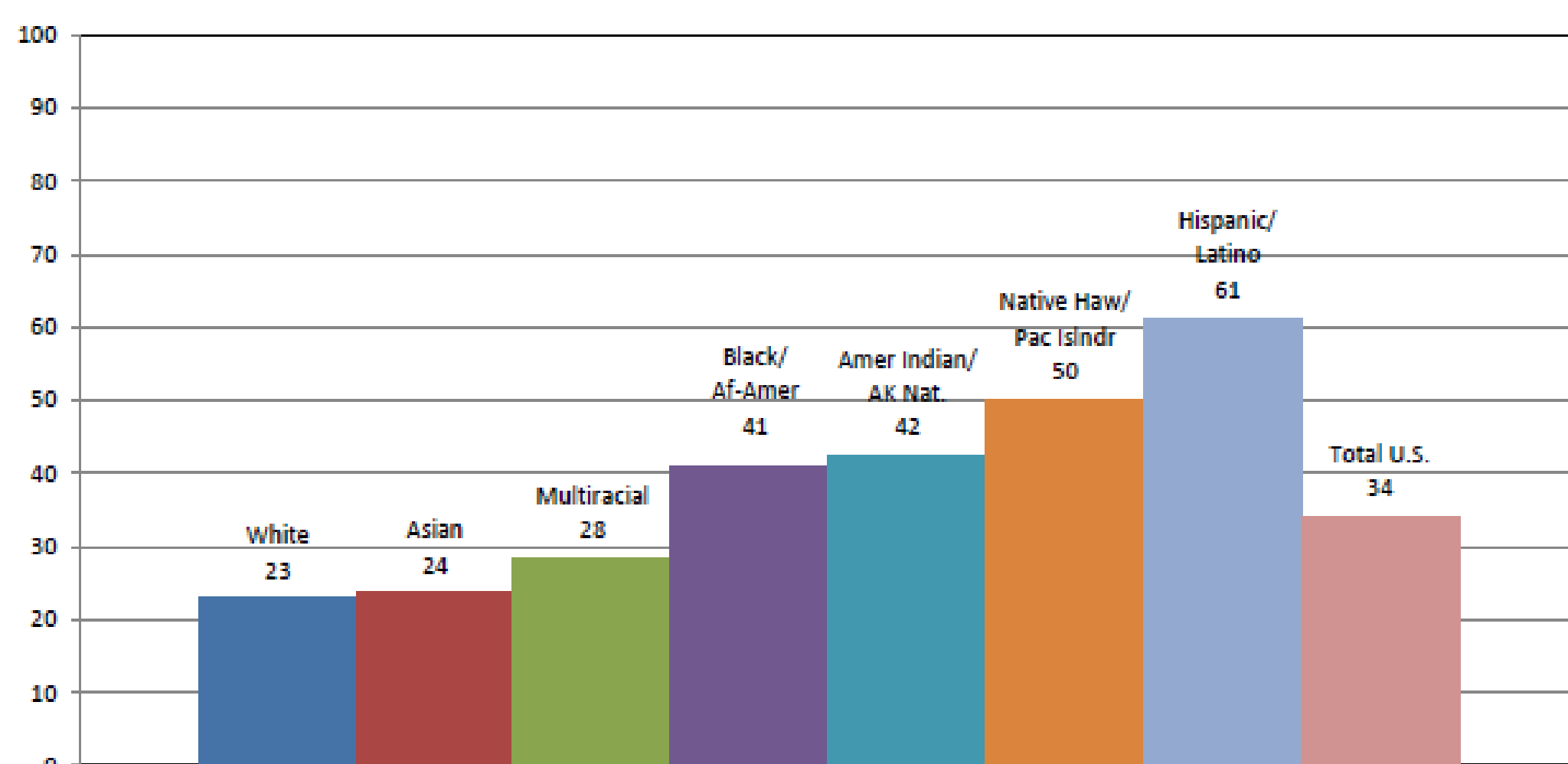
Introduction

For many individuals getting a college education is considered a privilege since it leads to their desired career, various life changing opportunities and experiences. For some, they are the first in their family to graduate from college with a four year degree. There is an increase in the number of first generation (FG) students attending college compared to the past ten to fifteen years. However, a significant percentage of these students are not graduating within the four year period because of the many challenges they have had to endure by being a first generation student.

Common Characteristics

- First person in the immediate family to attend college.
- Highest degree attained by either parent was a high school diploma, equivalent or less.
- May come from low, middle or higher-income families.
- Higher levels of engagement in civic activities, such as voting and volunteering.
- Higher rates of living healthy lifestyles, including lower rates of smoking and obesity.
- Increased likelihood of engagement in educational activities with one's children.

Percentage Distribution of U.S. 5- to 17-Year-Olds by First-Generation Status and Race/Ethnicity, 2011



Source: The Condition of Education 2012, NCES

--More than 1/3 of 5-17 year-olds in the U.S. are first-generation students
--This rate is highest among underrepresented minority groups

Challenges

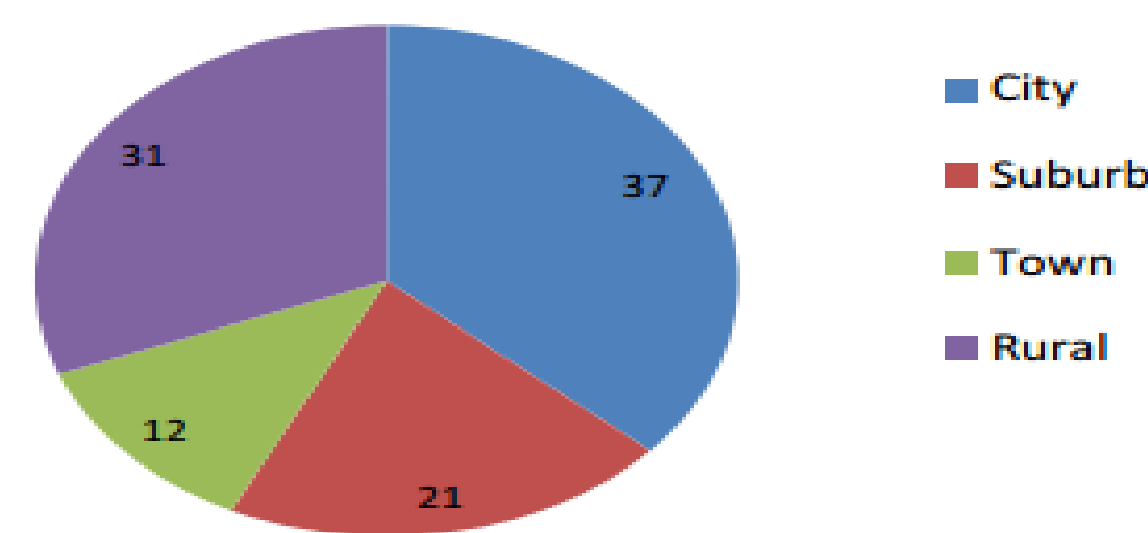
- Insufficient academic preparation.
- Lower pre-college critical thinking levels compared to their non-first generation peers.
- Limited access to information about college experience.
- Lack of knowledge of time management, financial constraints, budget management, and the culture of higher education.
- Less likely to perceive a warm welcome to campus.
- Low self-esteem, inadequate college adjustment, very little family support and racial disparity.

Statistics

- According to the Pell Institute, the average age of enrollment for first-generation college students is 22, compared to 20 for students who are not first generation.
- FG students are more likely to be financially responsible for others. 30 % of them had dependents in 2004, according to Pell, with 11 percent being single parents, while only 14 percent of non-first generation students had dependents and only 4 percent were single parents.
- While 42 percent of students whose parents attended college graduated within four years, only 27 percent of first-generation students graduated within four years.
- Approximately 60 % of students whose parents attended college graduated within five years, less than 45 % of first-generation students graduated in the same time frame.
- 64 % of students whose parents attended college graduated within six years. However, only 50 percent of first-generation students earned their degrees in that time frame.
- 36 % of first-generation students in their first or second year of undergraduate education reported taking a remedial class after high school, compared to 28 % of their peers whose parents had at least a bachelor's degree.

School Locale, 2011 Cohort

Percent of Schools with Majority First-Generation Test-Takers (N=4,900)



Source: NCES common core of data tables

Note: percents include only public schools with 10 or more SAT and/or AP test-takers.

Recommendations

- Mentoring and coaching makes a significant difference in the outcomes of first-generation students who otherwise lack family members who can guide them through college life.
- Students with diverse backgrounds can engage in intergroup dialogue which would enable them to share, explore and understand how their social differences can shape their own, as well as each members' experiences and opportunities in their academic life as well as life in general.
- Create a friendly and comfortable environment that will enable students to connect with their advisors from the beginning, during orientation week.
- Use various channels of communication such as university website, social media, apps, flyers/posters, to increase awareness of advising and other student support services.

References

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